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Leaders in Library Work with Immigrants: Jane Maud Campbell, 1869-1947

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Part I: The Newark and Passaic Years, 1906-1910

Jane Maud Campbell was born in England of Scottish parents, George and Jane (Cameron) Campbell, who had met and married in Virginia. The patriarch of the Campbell family, George, owned a shipping business, primarily transporting cotton, tobacco, and other dry goods, from England to America. The Campbell family was at home on both sides of the Atlantic. During the latter decades of the 1800s, a tobacco blight brought an abrupt end to George's shipping enterprise. He struggled to recoup his losses by redirecting family resources to the tanning industry, with family-owned and -operated factories at sites in both Virginia and West Virginia.

After the death of her mother and her father's subsequent marriage to an American, Rosalie Higgenbotham of Richmond, Virginia, the young Maud Campbell, who had been taught until the age of ten by governesses at the Campbells' home in Dulwich, Surrey, England, near London, was for the next five years educated at a girls' school near Richmond, Virginia. In her late teens, Maud was sent to live with relatives in Scotland, where she continued her education at the Ladies' College of the University of Edinburgh. Shortly after the receiving her master's degree in literature there, Maud immigrated to America permanently to be with her father, then living in New Jersey, where he had expanded his tanning business.¹

Having spent the early years of her adult life as the caregiver and nurturer for her extended, but close-knit, family and bookkeeper for the family tanning business in West Virginia, Campbell was thirty-two years old before she struck out on her own. In 1901, she applied for, passed a competitive examination, and secured a position as assistant in the reference department of the Newark (NJ) Public Library. She had had no formal library training.

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While in Newark she worked under Frank P. Hill, who soon moved on to the Brooklyn Public Library, and, later with his successor, John Cotton Dana. She lectured on the resources and services available through the public library and established traveling libraries and deposit stations throughout Newark. As a result of this work she came in contact with the bustling metropolis of Newark, with a foreign-born population of over 30 percent in the early 1900s.

After a brief period of eighteen months of "efficient service," to quote her employer and mentor, Dana, she had distinguished herself by being offered the position of public librarian at both Perth Amboy and Passaic, the New Jersey cities with the largest immigrant populations at that time. In deciding between the two cities, Maud chose Passaic. The fact that she was an immigrant herself undoubtedly swayed the library board there.²

Located in the industrial northeast of New Jersey, Passaic was the city where Scottish immigrant, Peter Reid, had made his fortune in textile manufacturing. Reid had

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Insert article "A Comparative and Critical Analysis of Leading Reference Sources" by Vladimir Wertsman is reprinted with permission from *The Multicultural Review*.

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chosen the public library, which afforded educational opportunities for rich and poor alike, as the primary beneficiary of his philanthropy. The new Jane Watson Reid Memorial Library, named in honor Reid's wife and opening in 1903, was situated in the heart of the Dundee district of Passaic, where Reid's textile mills flourished.

Her remarks to the American Library Association at its Niagara (NY) annual conference in 1903 revealed her vision for public library service in Passaic. Her concept of the public library as a democratic institution existing to serve the will of its constituents and her concept of the librarian as advocate for all segments of the library's community were made quite clear. This address established her reputation as an articulate communicator on issues involving library work with immigrants.

Campbell's strategy for helping immigrants to adjust to life in Passaic involved getting to them before they could speak English and before they were exploited by corrupt politicians, cornered by unwelcome proselytizers, or arrested for breaking laws of which they were ignorant. She believed that it was absolutely necessary to secure and provide books, newspapers, and periodicals in immigrant languages. Particularly important library materials for immigrants using the Passaic Public Library were those containing information about the customs, history, and government of the United States and the laws, statutes, ordinances, and regulations regarding health, sanitation, employment, and education that were enforced in the city of Passaic and the state of New Jersey.

Immigrants needed technical guides and instructional aids written in their native languages to help them advance in their chosen trades and crafts as well as to provide escape routes from the long hours in the factories and mills and the constant strain of domestic duties in crowded tenements. Library hours were extended to accommodate the lifestyles of working immigrants rather than expecting immigrants themselves always to have to make the accommodations or do without library services.

Whenever Campbell needed assistance in selecting, acquiring, and organizing the foreign language materials, she turned to the leaders of the immigrant community. The editors of the foreign language press were generous with newspaper space for advertising the library's foreign language acquisitions and holdings. She consulted regularly with local immigrant booksellers and established foreign language book dealers throughout the country, who advised her on availability, quality, and turnaround time to be expected when importing foreign language materials. She received special assistance from the immigrant literary and cultural societies, whose members, being thoroughly versed in the literatures of

particular ethnic or national groups, were able to help in cataloging the materials acquired.³

Soon Campbell found herself administering a collection of books in English as well as eleven foreign languages, including French, German, Dutch, Italian, Hungarian, Russian, Bohemian, Slovene, Polish, Hebrew, and Yiddish. The librarian from Passaic thus set the trend for other libraries serving immigrant clienteles. Between 1907 and 1916, the ALA Publishing Board addressed the need for foreign language materials for immigrant patrons of American public libraries by publishing seven Foreign Book Lists for the selection and acquisition of books in German, Hungarian, French, Danish and Norwegian, Swedish, Polish, and Russian. Campbell compiled the bibliography of recommended titles in the Hungarian language, which she compiled under the auspices of the New Jersey Public Library Commission, which was later adopted for use by the League of Library Commissions.⁴

Campbell viewed the public library as the primary educational institution for adult immigrants in Passaic. The provision of a free lecture series was a tangible example of the cooperation between the library and the immigrant community in Passaic. The leaders of the foreign societies, notably the Italian, Slovene, Polish, Bohemian, and Hungarian, approached Campbell with the proposition that they would provide capable lecturers in their respective native languages if the library would provide the space for the lectures.

She was receptive to the idea and it became the standard practice for the Passaic Public Library to sponsor lectures given in English and then in the languages of the nationalities or ethnic groups presenting the lectures. She could always be counted upon to champion causes of particular importance to the immigrant community, by defending the policy of free immigration, providing books in foreign languages in public libraries, lobbying for a fair wage for immigrant laborers, or petitioning health and sanitation officials for more frequent inspections of tenements.

Campbell applauded the success of the public school in carrying out its mandate in support of New Jersey's state compulsory education laws. New Jersey students were required to attend public school regularly until the age of fourteen. These laws assured at least a minimal education for immigrant children, including instruction in the English language and the inculcation of American values.

She realized that the educational needs of adult immigrants were not as easily met. The evening schools were not as successful due to the fact that evening schools were not readily available in all communities through

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New Jersey on a year-round basis and that their establishment, rather than being mandated by state law, remained a local option.

The same philosophy reflected in the reluctance to provide foreign language materials in public libraries as a hindrance to learning English also surfaced in the argument that evening school teachers should speak and understand only English. The logic was that adult immigrants should hear only the language they were expected to master. A further complication was the fact that most evening school classes were composed of adult immigrants of more than one nationality.

Campbell spoke with Passaic Public Library trustee, William Coggin Kimball, who was serving concurrently as chairman of the New Jersey Public Library Commission along with the New Jersey Supreme Court Justice John Franklin Fort, later to be governor of New Jersey. Both Kimball and Fort were impressed with Campbell's ideas and the expertise demonstrated in her work with immigrants in Passaic.

Kimball arranged an interview for Campbell with New Jersey Governor Edward Casper Stokes. On 10 April 1906, Governor Stokes appointed Campbell a member of a commission of three to study and report upon the general state of affairs regarding the conditions of immigrants coming into or resident in New Jersey. The 1906 New Jersey Immigration Commission was the first state commission to address the needs of immigrants on a statewide basis, according to Robert Watchorn, then U.S. Commissioner of Immigration. Campbell found herself the first woman appointed to a New Jersey commission.

In August 1906, at the Narragansett Pier (RI) annual conference of the ALA, Campbell called attention to her work with the New Jersey Immigration Commission and the potentially far-reaching effect other such state commissions could have on the education of immigrant adults throughout the country. The New Jersey Immigration Commission completed its mandate in December of the same year. At a banquet in Princeton, the commission, identified the education of the immigrant adult as the key to immigrant assimilation and progress, and recommended the establishment of evening schools on a statewide basis.

As part of its work, the commission had established and was maintaining experimental schools for Italians in Passaic and Princeton and working with similar schools in conjunction with the education authorities in Trenton and Burlington. The commission also published and distributed a primer in Italian and English geared to the needs of the adult immigrant Italian learning to speak English.⁵

In 1907, the New Jersey Legislature passed a law to

set up evening schools for adult immigrants. The 1907 adult immigrant education law provided for the boards of education of any New Jersey school district to establish public evening schools for the instruction of foreign-born residents over fourteen years of age in English and civics. Another provision of the law provided that the state would match any funds raised by a school district for the maintenance of public evening schools for immigrant adults.

The New Jersey adult immigrant education law set the pattern for the nation. Other states, including New York, California, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island, followed the example of New Jersey by appointing commissions to survey the needs of immigrants on a statewide basis.⁶

In May 1910, Campbell made the decision to leave her position as librarian at Passaic in order to concentrate her efforts in the area of adult immigrant education. On 7 May 1910, at the meeting of the trustees of the Passaic Public Library, trustee Kimball and Passaic's Mayor, Bird W. Spencer, honored Campbell for her work as librarian and advocate for the foreign born that had had a positive impact not only on the local community, but also throughout New Jersey.⁷

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7. Excerpts from the 1907 NJ adult immigration education law, quoted in NJ Commission of Immigration, *Report of the Commission of Immigration of the State of New Jersey Appointed Pursuant to the Provisions of Chapter 362 of the Laws of 1911* (Trenton: MacCrellish and Quigley, State Printers, 1914), 121.

8. Edward George Hartmann, *The Movement to Americanize the Immigrant* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948), 55, 71-76, 83, 86-87. The 1906 NJ Immigration Commission did not publish a report of its findings and recommendations.

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Editorial note: The next segment of Campbell's life to be treated will be her years in adult immigrant education with the North American Civic League for Immigrants (1910-13) and concluding with her years as Supervisor of Work with the Foreign Born of the Massachusetts Public Library Commission (1913-21).



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sacs, the Beaton's and, of course, the MacMasters are all represented here.

This is a great addition to the recorded Celtic legacy. Every track inspires a dance. This music really lives and should encourage all those interested to visit Cape Breton.

Burke, Kevin. *Sweeney's Dream: Fiddle Tunes from County Sligo, Ireland*. Smithsonian Folkways SFW CD 40485

Recorded in the Bronx, NY, in 1972 by Burke just after arriving in the U. S. at age 22, it offers the pure, melodic beauty of the Sligo tradition of fiddle playing in both solo and accompanied tracks.

The recordings here offer some pleasantly mellow dance tunes that roll off Burke's bow at a satisfying pace. It seems that the musicians got together at the suggestion of Isaac Breilauer and the improvisations are recorded here.

The most distinctive tracks are those of Burke alone, whose sound is rich and in tune. He writes, "I hope there will always be room in Irish music for the naked fiddle." (booklet, pg. 10) With proponents like Burke around, my guess is there always will be.

—JMc